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City Council

Scenic Views and Waterfront

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Title

Scenic Views and Waterfront

Recommended Action

Committee Recommendation:

Not referred to a committee.

City Manager Recommendation:

Discuss and provide guidance on language to be included in the draft Comprehensive Plan.

Report

Issue:

Should the goal and policies of the Draft Comprehensive Plan addressing scenic views (GL8 and its policies) be revised?

Staff Contact:

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Presenter:

Todd Stamm, Principal Planner, Community Planning and Development Department

Background and Analysis:

On August 12, 2014, following the public comment period, the Council directed that a work session be scheduled for more discussion of the 'Scenic View' and related 'Waterfront' aspects of the proposed Comprehensive Plan Update. This work session will provide Council members with an opportunity for discussion of options before making a final decision later in 2014.

Background

In 1976 Olympia's Comprehensive Plan included a goal to, "Enhance and preserve key visual characteristics of the city" and, among others, policies stating that:

1. Capitol dome should be a focal point in the design of the city. Sylvester Park and the old State Capitol should be preserved.
2. Viewpoints from which Budd Inlet, Mt. Rainier, and the Olympics can be

seen should be designated and protected.

3. Preservation of waterfront and viewpoints for public use should be a high priority.

Since at least the 1980s, the City of Olympia has used development regulations as part of its effort to preserve and enhance such scenic views. That effort has generally focused on those noted above and views of the Black Hills and major bodies of water. Particular regulations govern views of all of these features from certain streets and from the waterfront, of the Capitol dome from downtown, and views of Budd Inlet from East and West Bay Drives. (In addition, the City administers view protection provisions of the Shoreline Management Act.)

The primary policy in the current Comprehensive Plan on this topic is to:

Protect, to the greatest extent practical, scenic views of the Capitol Dome, Budd Inlet, Mount Rainier, the Black Hills, Capitol Lake, and the Olympic Mountains from designated viewing points and corridors. (Comprehensive Plan Policy LU 2.2)

In the 2012 draft comprehensive plan, staff proposed that this policy be replaced with one emphasizing public “viewpoints” and not “corridors,” which had been interpreted as views from streets. That proposed policy read:

Identify and designate significant public viewpoints and - with consideration of trees and other enhancing landscaping - protect, preserve and enhance particular views of the Capitol Campus, Budd Inlet, Downtown skyline, Mount Rainier, the Black Hills, Capitol Lake and surrounding treed slopes, and the Olympic Mountains, such as: [13 examples were provided].

(Draft Policy L6.10, analyzed in a draft of the Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS)).

Draft Comprehensive Plan Update - Analysis

The June 2014 Draft Comprehensive Plan includes the attached scenic view goal GL8 and five related policies (PL8.1 - 8.5). Policy PL8.5 includes many examples of “landmark views” and “observation points.” This proposed goal and its policies are analyzed in Section 24, “View Protection and Enhancement”, of the Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement. (See attached

excerpt from the SEIS.)

Other provisions of the Draft Plan call for protecting historic vistas associated with the Capitol Campus and preserving and enhancing water vistas from rights-of-way within one block of water bodies. (See draft Land Use and Design Policies 3.3 and 6.10.)

The Council received numerous public comments on the scenic views Goal and Policies proposal. Although each perspective differed slightly, public comments may be summarized as:

- Do not revise current Policy LU 2.2. The prospect of revising development regulations related to scenic views will be controversial and create uncertainty for property owners and in the real estate market.
- Do not adopt the proposed 'examples' list in Policy PL8.5. It will create a public expectation that many, most, or all of these views will be preserved and protected. Such extensive restrictions would unduly limit development in Olympia, and particularly constrain opportunities downtown.
- Especially consider the valued views, public open space aspects and development possibilities associated with the downtown waterfront. Be sure the pending update of the Shoreline Master Program is consistent with the updated Comprehensive Plan and the community's vision in this respect.
- Any extensive update of the City's scenic view regulations will require substantial resources for consultant services and public participation.

Neighborhood/Community Interests (if known):

These issues have been of significant public interest throughout the 'Imagine Olympia' Comprehensive Plan Update process.

Options:

1. Direct that the scenic view examples be removed from draft Land Use Policy 8.5 of the draft Plan, i.e., conclude with "... observation points and landmark views."
2. Direct that proposed Scenic View Goal 8 and related Policies 8.1 to 8.5 be replaced with Policy LU 2.2 from the current Comprehensive Plan (above).

3. Direct that Scenic View Goal 8 and related Policies 8.1 to 8.5 be replaced with Policy L6.10 from the 2012 staff-proposed draft Comprehensive Plan (above).
4. Direct no changes to the draft Comprehensive Plan Update.
5. Direct other revisions related to scenic views or waterfront, or both, aspects of the draft Plan.

Financial Impact:

No direct impacts; implementation of the Plan would be budgeted at a later date.